

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PRETOR 07023 221354Z
ACTION SS-25

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O 221258Z DEC 77
FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9997
INFO AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM
AMEMBASSY GABORONE
AMEMBASSY LAGOS
AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
AMEMBASSY MAPUTO
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L PRETORIA 7023

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PDEV, US, RH, UK
SUBJECT: RHODESIA: OUR RESPONSE TO SITHOLE

REF: PRETORIA 6985 AND 6995

1. SITHOLE APPARENTLY HAD SEVERAL OBJECTIVES IN
PROVIDING THE BRITISH AND OURSELVES MINUTES OF THE
INTERNAL TALKS AND A RUNDOWN BY GABELLAH ON THE PROCEEDINGS
TO DATE (REFTEL). IT IS CLEAR THAT HE WANTS TO STRESS
HIS INTENTION: TO WORK WITHIN THE "FRAMEWORK" OF THE
ANGLO-AMERICAN PROPOSAL; TO TAKE A TOUGH STAND WITH
SMITH ON THE CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES; AND TO MAKE IT POSSIBLE
FOR THE PATRIOTIC FRONT LEADERS-AT LEAST NKOMO--TO
PARTICIPATE. THE SAME POINTS WERE EMPHASIZED IN HIS
LETTERS TO NYERERE. SITHOLE'S OBJECTIVE, IT SEEMS
TO US, IS NOT ONLY TO ENHANCE HIS OWN RESPECTABILITY
BUT ALSO TO MAKE ANY AGREEMENT THAT SHOULD EMERGE FROM
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PAGE 02 PRETOR 07023 221354Z

THE SALISBURY TALKS AS ACCEPTABLE TO AS MANY OF THE
OTHER INTERESTED PARTIES AS POSSIBLE, IN PARTICULAR
THE BRITISH. IN FACT, HE APPEARS TO BE SEEKING MORE
THAN A BENIGN BRITISH ATTITUDE TOWARD THE INTERNAL
TALKS; BY ASKING FOR HMG ADVICE AT THIS POINT, HE IS
APPARENTLY HOPING TO DRAW THE BRITISH INTO SUPPORTING
A "SATISFACTORY" INTERNAL SETTLEMENT. SITHOLE CAN ALSO

EXPECT THAT HIS APPEAL TO THE BRITISH AND HIS APPROACHES TO US AND HYERERE CAN ONLY STRENGTHEN HIS HAND WITH SMITH.

2. SITHOLE'S APPROACH TO THE BRITISH AND US RAISES THESE QUESTIONS:

- A) HOW THE BRITISH RESPOND TO GABELLAH'S REQUEST FOR ADVICE REGARDING THE INTERNAL SETTLEMENT NEGOTIATIONS.
- B) WHETHER AND HOW WE RESPOND TO SITHOLE'S LETTER OF DECEMBER 14 TRANSMITTING DOCUMENTS FROM THE SALISBURY TALKS AND OFFERING PERIODIC BRIEFINGS.

3. I ASSUME WE WILL WANT TO COORDINATE CLOSELY WITH HMG ON THE ADVICE TO BE FURNISHED SITHOLE. THIS REQUEST WOULD APPEAR TO PROVIDE AN EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY TO REMIND SITHOLE--PERHAPS MUZOREWA--THAT THE ANGLO-AMERICAN PROPOSALS ARE VERY MUCH IN BEING AND THAT ANY SOLUTION WHICH FALLS SHORT OF THE FUNDAMENTALS OF OUR PACKAGE WILL NOT ACHIEVE PEACE NOR RESULT IN THE LIFTING OF SANCTIONS. THIS MIGHT ALSO BE A GOOD TIME TO ASK SITHOLE AND MUZOREWA TO COME TO LONDON OR OTHER APPROPRIATE PLACE FOR FURTHER SERIOUS DISCUSSION ON THE ANGLO-AMERICAN PACKAGE AS OWEN IS CONSIDERING DOING WITH THE PF. SUCH AN INVITATION MIGHT GIVE THEM PAUSE IN PLUNGING HEADLONG INTO A SETTLEMENT WITH SMITH.

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PAGE 03 PRETOR 07023 221354Z

4. WITH RESPECT TO OUR RESPONSE TO SITHOLE'S LETTER, I BELIEVE WE SHOULD MAKE A SPECIFIC REPLY. THIS COMES AT A TIME WHEN THE DEPARTMENT IS SEEKING WAYS TO ESTABLISH ON-GOING CONTACT WITH THE INTERNAL NATIONALIST LEADERS (STATE 301678). THE SITHOLE APPROACH PROVIDES A CHANNEL OF COMMUNICATION AT LEAST DURING THIS SENSITIVE PERIOD, WHEN CONSIDERATION OF SENDING AN OFFICER FROM HERE OR SOME OTHER POST ON THE PERIPHERY TO SALISBURY IS OUT OF THE QUESTION. WHILE ANY CONTACT WITH SITHOLE AT THIS TIME RUNS CERTAIN RISKS, WE BELIEVE THAT IF PROPERLY HANDLED, NEGATIVE REPERCUSSIONS COULD BE MINIMIZED. WE SEE THESE FOUR OPTIONS FOR ANSWERING SITHOLE'S LETTER:

- A) MAKE NO DIRECT RESPONSE BUT CONVEY WHAT WE HAVE TO SAY ON THE ANGLO-AMERICAN PROPOSALS, THE INTERNAL SETTLEMENT TALKS, AND FUTURE CONTACTS THROUGH THE BRITISH RESPONSE TO THE GABELLAH VISIT.
- B) SEND A BRIEF LETTER TO SITHOLE TO BE DELIVERED BY THE BRITISH FCO ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER RESIDENT IN SALISBURY WHO WILL BE IN PRETORIA OVER THE NEW YEAR'S HOLIDAY. THE LETTER WOULD THANK SITHOLE FOR HIS LETTER AND INDICATE THAT I WOULD LOOK FORWARD TO TALKING WITH

GABELLAH WHEN HE RETURNED TO PRETORIA. AT THE SAME TIME, I WOULD SEND A LETTER VIA THE SAME COURIER TO MUZOREWA INDICATING THAT I HAVE BEEN IN TOUCH WITH SITHOLE AND SAYING THAT IF THE BISHOP SHOULD HAVE A REPRESENTATIVE PASSING THROUGH PRETORIA, I WOULD LOOK FORWARD TO HAVING A TALK WITH HIM.

C) SEND A MESSAGE TO BOTH SITHOLE AND MUZOREWA ORALLY BY THE BRITISH OFFICER. IN THIS CASE, I COULD MORE DIRECTLY INDICATE THAT WE--AND THE BRITISH--WOULD WELCOME A REGULAR EXCHANGE OF VIEWS IN PRETORIA.

D) TELEPHONE SITHOLE TO THANK HIM FOR HIS LETTER AND INDICATE THAT WE WOULD LOOK FORWARD TO TALKING TO GABELLAH THE NEXT TIME HE IS IN PRETORIA ABOUT THE ANGLO-AMERICAN PLAN AND OTHER MATTERS. I WOULD SUGGEST
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 PRETOR 07023 221354Z

THAT IT WOULD BE A GOOD IDEA IF WE COULD GET TOGETHER SOON. I WOULD SUBSEQUENTLY CALL MUZOREWA, INDICATE THAT I HAD BEEN IN TOUCH WITH SITHOLE AND SUGGEST THAT IF HE HAS A REPRESENTATIVE COMING TO PRETORIA SOON, I WOULD WELCOME THE CHANCE TO TALK WITH HIM.

5. NORMALLY, I WOULD FAVOR OPTION (C) AS OFFERING A LOW KEY COMMUNICATION WITH SITHOLE AND MUZOREWA THAT THEY COULD NOT EASILY EXPLOIT TO IDENTIFY US WITH THE INTERNAL TALKS. IT WOULD ALSO, OF COURSE, BE THE MOST SECURE METHOD. I AM CONCERNED, HOWEVER, THAT WE CANNOT AFFORD TO WAIT TWO WEEKS TO RESPOND TO SITHOLE AND CONTACT MUZOREWA. SMITH HAS TALKED ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF REACHING AGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE BY THE END OF THE YEAR. CONSEQUENTLY, I RECOMMEND THAT WE FOLLOW OPTION (D). IF DEPARTMENT CONCURS IN THIS COURSE, REQUEST SPECIFIC GUIDANCE ON LINE TO TAKE IN PHONE CALLS AND FOR HANDLING VISITS TO PRETORIA BY GABELLAH OR OTHER SITHOLE REPRESENTATIVES.

6. POSTSCRIPT: FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF SITHOLE'S LETTER TO ME:
QUOTE
YOUR EXCELLENCY,
GREETINGS TO YOU.

I AM SENDING TO YOU DR. ELLIOT GABELLAH, MY SECOND VICE-PRESIDENT, TO DELIVER TO YOU IN PERSON VARIOUS DOCUMENTS RELEVANT TO THE CURRENT INTERNAL SETTLEMENT GOING ON IN SALISBURY BETWEEN THE RHODESIAN GOVERNMENT AND THE AFRICAN NATIONALIST LEADERS BASED INSIDE THE COUNTRY, AND TO BRIEF YOU ORALLY ON OTHER RELEVANT MATTERS FOR TRANSMISSION TO YOUR GOVERNMENT. WE HOPE TO KEEP YOU BRIEFED REGULARLY ON THE PROGRESS
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PAGE 05 PRETOR 07023 221354Z

OF THE TALKS.

WITH KIND REGARDS AND GOOD WISHES,

YOURS SINCERELY,

NDABANINGI SITHOLE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
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Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
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Control Number: n/a
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Sent Date: 22-Dec-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 22 May 2009
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
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